WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1.   A computer system comprising:

a processor;

a memory coupled to the processor, the memory storing

        a pre-selected input characteristic;

        a stored password;

        instructions causing the processor to compare a first input entered by the user to the pre-selected input characteristic;

        instructions causing the processor to ignore an input during a power-on self test procedure unless the first input matches the pre-selected input characteristic;

        instructions causing the processor to prompt a user of the computer system for a password when the first input matches the pre-selected input characteristic;

        instructions causing the processor to compare a password entered by the user to the stored password; and

        instructions causing the processor to process inputs during the power-on self test procedure subsequent to the first input when the password entered by the user matches the stored password.

2.   The computer system of claim 1 wherein:

the memory further stores instructions causing the processor to process inputs other than the first input if the password entered by the user is entered within a pre-specified period of time after the user is prompted.

3.   The computer system of claim 1 wherein:

the data corresponds to a keystroke on a keyboard.

4.   The computer system of claim 3 wherein:

the data corresponds to an F2 key.

5.   The computer system of claim 1 wherein:

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2   the processing of inputs other than the first input enables the user to access a system

3   setup procedure.

1   6.   The computer system of claim 1 wherein:

2   the processing of inputs other than the first input enables the user to request boot

3   functions.

1   7.   The computer system of claim 1 wherein:

2   the processing of inputs other than the first input enables the user to reboot the

3   computer system.

1   8.   The computer system of claim 1 wherein:

2   the processing of inputs other than the first input enables the user to switch off a

3   power supply of the computer system.

1   9.   The computer system of claim 1 wherein:

2   the processing of inputs other than the first input enables the user to access an Option

3   Read Only Memory utility.

1   10.   The computer system of claim 1 wherein:

2   the processing of inputs other than the first input enables the user to halt a power-on

3   self test function.

1   11.   The computer system of claim 1 wherein:

2   the processing of inputs other than the first input enables the user to omit a power-on

3   self test function.

1   12.   A method of operating a computer system comprising:

2   ignoring all inputs from an input/output device during a power-on self test procedure

3   except a pre-specified input;

4   upon detection of the pre-specified input, prompting a user for a password;

5   comparing the password entered by the user in response to the prompting to a

6   previously-stored password; and

7   processing inputs other than the pre-specified input during the power-on self-test

8   procedure if and only if the password entered by the user matches the

9   previously-stored password.

1   13.   The method of claim 12 wherein:

2   the comparing is performed if and only if the password entered by the user is entered

3   within a pre-specified period of time after the prompting.

1   14.   The method of claim 12 wherein:

2   the pre-specified input is generated by a keystroke on a keyboard.

1   15.   The method of claim 14 wherein:

2   the keystroke is a pressing of an F2 key.

1   16.   The method of claim 12 wherein:

2   the processing gives a user access to a system setup procedure.

1   17.   The method of claim 12 wherein:

2   the processing gives a user an ability to request boot functions.

1   18.   The method of claim 12 wherein:

2   the processing gives a user an ability to reboot the computer system.

1   19.   The method of claim 12 wherein:

2   the processing gives a user an ability to switch off a power supply of the computer

3   system.

1   20.   The method of claim 12 wherein:

2   the processing gives a user an ability to access an Option Read Only Memory utility.

1   21.   The method of claim 12 wherein:

2   the processing gives a user an ability to halt a power-on self test function.

1   22.   The method of claim 12 wherein:

2   the processing gives a user an ability to omit a power-on self test function.

1   23.   A computer program product comprising a storage medium storing data and

2   instructions operable to:

3   mask all inputs from an input/output device during a power-on self test procedure,

4   except at least one input that corresponds to predetermined data;

5   upon reception of an input that corresponds to the predetermined data, transmit a

6   prompt for a password;

7   compare a password received from the input/output device to a qualified password;

8   and

9   if the received password conforms to the qualified password, accept and respond to

10   other inputs from an input/output device during the power-on self test

11   procedure.

24.   The computer program product of claim 23 wherein:

the masking masks from a processor the inputs from an input/output device during

        power-on self test; and

the reception of the input that corresponds to the predetermined data is performed by

        the processor.

25.   The computer program product of claim 23 wherein:

the comparing compares a password received from the input/output device that is

        received within a pre-specified period of time after the prompting.

1   26.   The computer program product of claim 23 wherein:

2   the accepting and responding to other inputs enables the user to access a system setup

3   procedure.

1   27.   The computer program product of claim 23 wherein:

2   the accepting and responding to other inputs enables the user to request boot

3   functions.

1   28.   The computer program product of claim 23 wherein:

2   the accepting and responding to other inputs enables the user to reboot the computer

3   system.

1   29.   The computer program product of claim 23 wherein:

2   the accepting and responding to other inputs enables the user to switch off a power

3   supply of the computer system.

1   30.   The computer program product of claim 23 wherein:

2   the accepting and responding to other inputs enables the user to access an Option

3   Read Only Memory utility.

1   31.   The computer program product of claim 23 wherein:

2   the accepting and responding to other inputs enables the user to halt a power-on self

3   test function.

1   32.   The computer program product of claim 23 wherein:

2   the accepting and responding to other inputs enables the user to omit a power-on self

3   test function.